

EXHIBIT

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FROM : BELGRADE COUNSELING CLINIC

FAX NO. : 3884958

MAR. 29 2007

DATE 4-4-07

SB 434

**Belgrade Counseling Clinic, Inc.**

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March 29, 2007

Members of the House Business and Labor Committee  
Montana State Legislature  
Helena, MT

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Ginny Watts. I am a past president of the Montana Clinical Mental Health Counselors Association and current president of the Montana Sex Offender Treatment Association. I am writing to express my opposition to SB 434, Licensure and regulation for marriage and family therapists. I am concerned both by the lack of acknowledgement of the true financial impact of this bill and by the superfluous nature of the bill.

While the estimated expenses for implementing SB 434 appear small (under \$5000), I believe that the ongoing expense of administering an additional license is being overlooked. Each time a separate license is established for the state, it is not only necessary to institute the paperwork for that license but it is also necessary to maintain, notify, and support the population licensed. To assume that there will be no impact on the budget of the licensing board short of the supplies required to notify potential licensees ignores the service that the staff of the licensing board provide to licensees in Montana. In a past legislative session, the legislature established a certification process for individuals conducting sex offender specific evaluations. The legislature did not, however, provide additional funds for the board to oversee the certification. The board was unable to follow through initially with these new responsibilities because of a lack of available funds for the increased responsibilities of managing a relatively small number of professionals (certainly fewer in number than the number of potential licensed marriage and family therapists).

In addition, I am frustrated that the legislature is slashing funding for programs that serve the public while the Business and Labor Committee is considering funding licensure that is redundant. If the legislature wishes to save money, I would suggest that time and energy be reserved for important issues rather than developing a redundant licensing law. The Montana Legislature crafted an excellent licensing law for counselors in the state of Montana. Our Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor law was exemplary and was passed by our legislature long before many other states had developed or implemented such a law. We don't need to fracture the licensing process to acknowledge every area of specialty. We, as professional counselors, have ways to recognize our specialties through national certifications and through membership in our specialty organizations. The current licensing law for counselors acknowledges that individuals may not practice outside their scope of training. It is not necessary to designate a special area of training with a separate license. I appreciate the committee's attention to the field of counseling. I would ask that you reserve your very limited and precious time to address bills that are necessary and beneficial to the citizens of Montana. SB 434 is simply not one of those necessary bills. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Ginny Watts, M. Ed., LCPC  
MSOTA Clinical Member

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